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MEMOIR

RUN

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Today I was driving up north to teach, and the road was clear and sunny, and the trees were mottled rust and orange with a few bright green leaves still hanging on, and I had Minnesota Public Radio on, and I was thinking of my grandma like I always do when I listen to MPR, and it was a good day—and did I mention the sun was off to my left just skimming a few hours over the horizon? I was sipping some whey-protein cappuccino drink, which was actually pretty tasty, and I had just snacked on a Reese’s Peanut Butter Cup to go along with that creamy but bland whey-coffee taste, and I was in rural Minnesota far away from the clatter of the city and all those liberal white folks and smacking my lips from that coffee and chocolate and peanut butter, thinking good thoughts, thinking life is good, that I’ve got my mid-term grades done, all the quizzes and midterm tests are stuffed in my

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cheap black briefcase I picked up at a garage sale a few years ago, my students will be glad, they'll give me good assessments, I'm getting my work done on time, I'm getting organized, I paid my bills over the weekend, I'm going to get my teeth cleaned and one will get capped, I ate some stir fry with cabbage and onions for lunch, I went for a run, my heating bill is only thirty bucks this late in the season, the litter box is clean, my twenty-year-old cat is putting on weight, my dog has new chew bones, my stories are coming out in *Feminist Studies*, my mom is holding her own against the cancer, I went to Big Drum over the weekend, my friends and I are making a power-and-control wheel for Native women, I got my boat in storage, my prep for tomorrow is done, I sent out those thank you notes, I worked on some art earlier today, my house is clean, my laundry is done, I'm wearing this new brown sweater with wide baggy sleeves just the way I like them, I have the best car in the world, it's still running even though the oil pressure valve burst in Minneapolis a month ago and the oil sprayed out all over the car's belly and began clacking, which means one of the rods is going to bust through the engine and smack into the hood at any time.

There I was, headed up north to teach a group of unassuming (and mostly uninterested) students the finer points of oratory when I looked off to my right at a semi I was hauling ass on; and my brain clicked on these chains, thick shiny loops of steel wrapped around something, the sleds, the feet, of snowmobiles and like a camera my consciousness clicked on that, felt shocked, felt numbed, felt nothing; held the picture without registering what the chains were wrapped around, still traveling at light speed (actually 72 mph), it held fast to those chains, shiny, speeding chains, bright from the sun, loud from the sun, hauling ass on that semi, the sun to my left leaping over bushes and trees and scattered clouds; my students waiting in anticipation of great ideas, even ideals, given Aristotle's presence in our *logos* section (those Greeks follow you everywhere), and my consciousness, *click click*, like a camera, a legacy to the porn they made of me—it's in my head now, no getting rid of it, clicking on those chains, so unexpected, so unprepared for that image; the sun, the speed, the goodness of the day, a complete day, the protein shake, healthy, laughing, snug, safe—no longer.

Like that it is shattered. My mind reels, moves from shock, frozen time and space, Dad's ice cube Manhattans, my wrists caught, scrawny, tiny—almost baby wrists—yanking, pulling, the radiator, my mind snaps, it reels, it jumps, it moves, it stops midair, midsentence, mid-

thought. A house. Sun. Summer. Men. Shouts. Moans. Laughter. Screams. Rape. Death.

A house, sun, summer, one tree, the rest shaved away; thirty, forty yards from the house there was a line, that bearded look farmhouses have, the trees shaved in the shape of a ring then flat farmland, just a ring of trees, a horseshoe of trees to make room for the driveway, then dirt—at this house, this particular house there was dirt and it was dry.

I am transported in a flash; gone are the good thoughts, the good feelings, in their place the dirt, the tree, the upstairs, the dining room of that particular house on that particular day in the middle of nowhere USA, nowhere Minnesota; they cut down the forest in a generation. No one is going to hear, no one will come close; the drive is a long ribbon from the road, a tied-up dog barks, someone watches to make sure no one approaches; the tree, the beard of trees, my wrists, the snowmobile sleds; the heavy chains, so heavy, linked my wrists in a leather cuff, a tiny leather cuff someone obviously constructed to hold tiny wrists, almost baby wrists; they lined it with something soft and white and wooly, careful not to leave marks unless directed to do so, so careful they are, so thought out, so methodical; tiny leather cuffs for tiny wrists, linked to a radiator, linked to a snowmobile sled, and my consciousness, when it unlocks, it feels revulsion for those chains on that semi, and in a child's way it feels distress for those sleds, for one moment, a child's thought, a child's feeling, fear of the chains, anger at whomever chained them down, sympathy for the sleds.

Sympathy for the sleds.

All of that unleashes, and the tree and the dry dirt outside and the dusty wood floor and the wrists and the heavy chains and the way I, the child, the girl, lay on her belly, stretched out, her shirt and pants getting dusty, her belly on the coolness of the floor, wood slats, the smoothness, the body stretched out, the girl, listening, not listening, knowing what they do, she can't help but hear, feels it's her fault because she is there, because she is alive, because she can hear, because she cannot stop them.

She yanks on the chains, tries to slide her hands out; she yanks and yanks and yanks. She tries to get free. She would run. She knows. She would run. Past the tree. Past the dog chained to the tree. Over the dirt. Past the bearded trees toward the horizon, the flat farmland horizon, she would run and she would not look back, because she knows they would be there, then on her, laughing or angry depending on their mood, depending on the individual.

She has run before. Now she is chained. Now she yanks. She is no threat, no one will discover her and if they did she is four, but time is money, and she is property, a prop in their script, a very important prop—the things she can do, such a young age, so tender, yet trained well, she is valuable, highly valuable; men will pay much to see her, to do her, and no one wants to chase her. No one wants to have to go looking for her, hiding in the barn like she does, like she thinks she is safe there, hidden. So chain her, lock her, bind her to the radiator that will be spitting water, clicking, once the cold sets in, months from now.

Chain her. Dogs are chained. Boats are chained. Wagons are chained. Doors are chained. Fences are chained. *Chain her.* Gates are chained. Snowmobiles are chained. Trailers are chained. Fish houses are chained. *Chain her.*

No one wants to have to chase her, like they've done in the past. When they catch her some are meaner than others. One yanks her, pops her shoulder out, drags her. Another laughs; it's funny she tried to run. The little shit has spunk. But it doesn't matter. It won't matter. They'll beat it out of her.

And she would run, to the horizon, that flat line of land so far away, the sun out, twirling overhead, hazy rings spinning off; she would run, all that would matter to her would be to get far away. The sun beating on her back, her tiny back, baby crow wings poke out as she runs, the sun on her skin, making her brown like her grandmas—American Indian—she runs. She runs like her ancestors, across plowed fields, smoke curling from the kitchen, bacon frying, grease spitting, mid spit when the soldiers came to take them—mother, father, sister, auntie, running over the fields, dropping behind trees, hiding in those closed basement spaces, until the door cracks, light floods the damp, the girl, the child, hiding from the rifle, the bayonet, rounding them up for the walk to the west, the wait in the camps, four feet of mud, maggot-infested meat, elders dying, babies crying, soldiers killing in the fields, not waiting for the camps, rounding them up, tying their hands together, raping the women and girls, teaching them prostitution, food and money for rape; they are dragged, they are murdered, they are starved; long ropes connect the people now.

This girl, she runs. She has their fear, their shame, their pride, their resilience. This girl, she runs. She has their knowledge, her ancestors, land stolen, lives taken, smoldering fires stoked by white settlers as they moved in, greedy, wanting to own, own everything, wanting land, wanting livestock, wanting slaves, wanting gold. This girl, she has that knowledge, and her spirit thanks her ancestors, as she

runs, tiny crow wings beating, sun on her back making her brown, she runs, this girl. Away from the men, this time not soldiers, but it doesn't matter; they're the same, one hundred and thirty-six years later; she has that knowledge, and time cannot take it from her, and silence cannot take it from her. No one can take it from her. She runs. She doesn't know where. She doesn't have a plan. There is no plan to be had.

This girl, she has run. This girl, she would run again. This girl, she cannot run now, her wrists chained to the radiator; she yanks, but she is caught. Her mind takes a picture, that sunny day, sprawled on that dusty floor; now she has a picture, and her body and her mind will remember, in a flash—a literal flash on a highway or standing in line—and they will remind her, and she will fear being trapped, and she will run, and for years she will see her life not for what it is, a gift, but as a curse, and her life will be difficult, like her ancestors, dying in the snow, on the trail to the west, in the direction of death, without a plan, without food, without blankets, without shoes, without knowing how or if they would survive. But they did. And so will she. And somehow she will pass this knowledge along, if not through blood then through words.